

MEASURING DURIN'S CONVENTION
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Abraham Lincoln's Political Career through 1860

Chicago During Convention 1860

Excerpts from newspapers and other sources

From the files of the
Lincoln Financial Foundation Collection

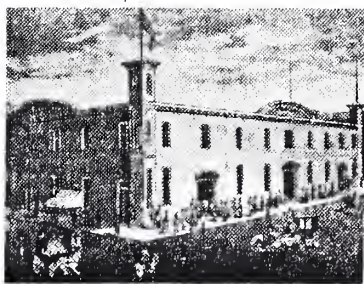
Historic Chicago Sites

By JOHN DRURY

THE WIGWAM.

What was probably the most important event in Abraham Lincoln's life and what was certainly an important event in Chicago history occurred in a building at the southeast corner of Wacker dr. and Lake st.—a spot already made historic as the site of the famous Sauganash Hotel of early Chicago. This site is now occupied by the eight-story 333 West Lake Street Building, on the front and side of which are historical tablets describing the events which occurred there.

The building on this spot associated with Lincoln is renowned in American history as the Wigwam, so called after an Indian



The Wigwam.

dwelling. It was in the Wigwam, a large two-story hall or auditorium, that Lincoln received the Republican nomination for President on May 18, 1860—a nomination that led him, as almost everyone knows, to the White House as the 16th President of the United States.

Built for G.O.P. Convention.

After the newly formed Republican party voted to hold its national convention in Chicago the city built a temporary convention hall of rough pine boards and named it the Wigwam. Costing \$7,000, it was the largest hall ever built in the city until then, having a seating capacity of 10,000, with a stage holding 600. Visitors and delegates entered through three big doors on the Market (now Wacker dr.) st. side. The interior was decorated with flags and red, white and blue bunting.

Here, on that fateful May 18, in 1860, the delegates and visitors crowded the Wigwam until its walls fairly bulged. For it was on that day the balloting for candidates was scheduled to begin. When the convention opened the strongest candidate was William H. Seward, former governor and senator of New York. On the first

and thousands of visitors in it celebrated the great event that night.

But the candidate himself, the "rail-splitter candidate" from Illinois, was not present when he was nominated in the Wigwam. Instead he was in the office of the Springfield Journal at Springfield, Ill. When a telegram was handed to him announcing his nomination he was heard to say: "I reckon there's a little short woman down at our house that would like to hear the news." And he walked to his house and told his wife.



The Site Today.

ballot he led. On the second Lincoln gained more votes than he had on the first. And then on the third ballot Lincoln moved ahead of Seward and thus won the nomination.

First Prairie Nominee.

When that happened thousands of delegates and visitors in the Wigwam shouted with a great roar for their winning man, the "rail-splitter candidate" from Illinois. Soon cannon were booming and that night bonfires were lighted. It was the first time a man of the prairies, a man who had often visited Chicago before as a lawyer, had been nominated for the presidency. The whole city

Chicago Daily News 7/6/73

City wrote book on political conventions

By Robert Davis
TRIBUNE STAFF WRITER

It was a nation at war with itself when party delegates gathered in Chicago to choose a nominee for president. Outside in the downtown streets, well-planned but raucous demonstrations erupted as citizens demanded a voice in the process.

Inside the crowded convention hall, tensions were equally high as the ideologically split delegates wrestled over their choices before picking the party's candidate to lead the country through that vicious and unpopular war.

The last national political convention in Chicago in 1968?

Nope.

Actually, it was the first. In 1860, Re-

publican delegates huddled in a new 10,000-seat meeting place known as the Wigwam at Lake Street and Wacker Drive and selected a failed U.S. Senate candidate named Abraham Lincoln to bear the GOP banner into the Civil War.

Although New York Sen. William Seward had been thought to be the front-runner, Illinoisans used their home-court advantage to stampede delegates into choosing Lincoln on the second ballot. The rest, of course, is history.

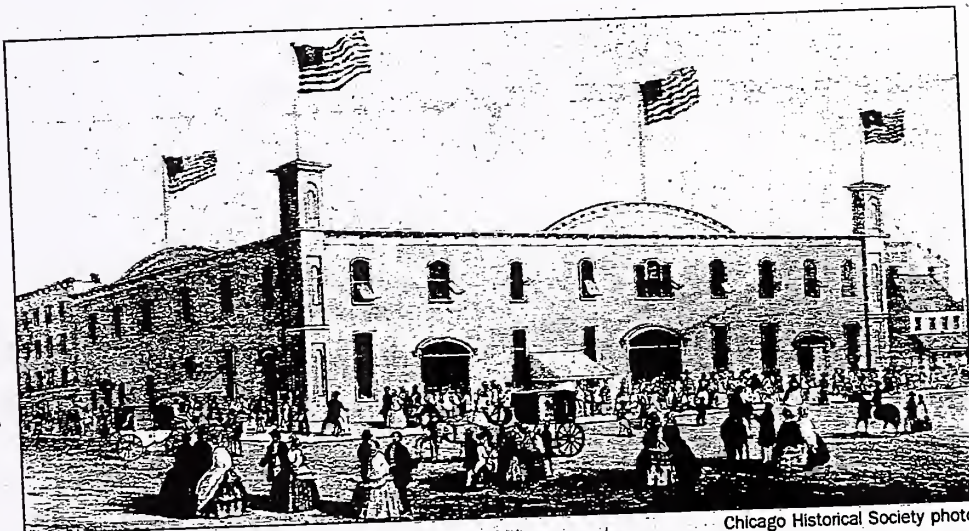
In the next 108 years, Chicago established its place as the most frequent political convention site of any city.

As the Democratic National Committee prepares officially to select Chicago as the site of its 1996 national convention,

much has been made of its riotous gathering here in 1968, which reduced the city to a microcosm of the national mood of unrest spawned by the Vietnam War.

Both major political parties have shunned Chicago for the last 26 years, primarily because of bad memories from that episode. The convention tore apart the Democratic Party and helped elect

SEE CONVENTIONS, PAGE 7



Chicago Historical Society photo

The 10,000-seat Wigwam, at Lake Street and Wacker Drive, where Republican delegates met in 1860 and nominated Abraham Lincoln for president.

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Conventions

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Republican Richard Nixon president.

"The highly-charged atmosphere inside the convention and the violence outside on the streets made for great television drama," said Chicago Ald. Edward Burke (14th). "The images from that convention are etched in many people's minds."

But Chicago has hosted 25 major national political conventions, starting with the Wigwam gathering in 1860. Several of them were at least as controversial as 1968—and probably more history-making, although they never achieved such lasting notoriety through TV and film.

Playing host to two national parties in 1884, 1912, 1932, 1944, and 1952, Chicago, with its central location, remains the convention champ. Baltimore, with 10 conventions, and Philadelphia, with seven, aren't even close.

Chicago history buffs know the city's appellation as "The Windy City" comes not from the breezes off Lake Michigan but rather as a mocking monicker slapped on the city by a New York journalist describing the blustery bursts coming from Chicago's politicians.

The Wigwam, the Coliseum, the International Amphitheater, the Chicago Stadium—all have been sites of political conventions in Chicago. But politics is a citywide sport here, and some major choices have been made outside the convention confines.

When the Republican convention delegates met in June 1920, Warren G. Harding was not picked in the convention hall but rather was plucked from political obscurity by a group of powerful insiders meeting in a now-legendary "smoke-filled room" in the Blackstone Hotel.

The longest run in U.S. presidential history began in Chicago in 1932 when Franklin D. Roosevelt was nominated by the Democrats to lead the country out of the Great Depression. FDR's nomination marked the first time a political convention was held at the Chicago Stadium.

Eight years later, and back in Chicago, Roosevelt had decided to stick with a tradition established by George Washington and eschew an unprecedented third presidential term.

But Chicago Mayor Edward Kelly would have none of that. Behind the scenes, Kelly plotted to reject Roosevelt's withdrawal.

"I am happy to have been partly responsible for Franklin D. Roosevelt's precedent-smashing third term," Kelly wrote in his memoirs in 1947. "I was the first to issue a 'draft Roosevelt' statement. I believe I was the first to tell him to his face this it was his 'duty' to run again," Kelly said.

But not without a little help from his friends, Kelly confessed.

Dipping into Chicago's hefty bag of political dirty tricks, Kelly planted Thomas Garry, the city's sewer commissioner, in the basement of the Stadium on the night

Chicago was host to 25 national political conventions

For more than 100 years, U.S. political parties chose Chicago to hold their national political conventions. Here, Abraham Lincoln received the nod to run as the 1860 Republican candidate, followed by 24 other nominees including, Theodore Roosevelt, Franklin D. Roosevelt and Richard Nixon.

1860

Chicago's first national political convention saw Illinois' own Abraham Lincoln win the Republican nomination, then defeat Illinoisan Stephen A. Douglas, and lead the nation through the Civil War.

1864

Democrat Gen. George D. McClellan got the nod in Chicago, but Lincoln handily defeated him in November.

1868

Popular Union Gen. Ulysses S. Grant won the Republican nomination, then marched his way to the White House.

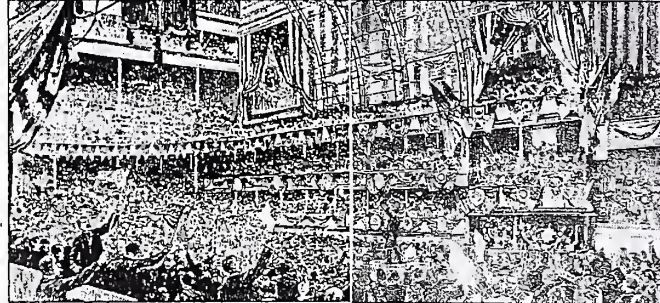


1880

James Garfield won over the Republican convention when his stirring speech nominating another candidate inspired the convention to nominate him instead.

1884

Chicago's lakefront exposition building saw conventions from both parties. Republicans nominated James G. Blaine, in June, who lost in November to Grover Cleveland, who won the Democratic nod in July.



1888

1888

Republicans nominated Benjamin Harrison at the new Chicago auditorium. Harrison went on to defeat President Cleveland's first try for a second term.

1892

The Democrats returned to town to nominate former President Grover Cleveland, who then defeated Benjamin Harrison, the man he lost to four years earlier.

1896

Nebraska newspaper reporter William Jennings Bryan was nominated by Democrats at Chicago, but lost the election.

1904

Theodore Roosevelt, hero of the Spanish and American War, won the Republican nomination on the first ballot and defeated Democrat Alton Parker in the fall.



1908

Ohioan William Howard Taft was nominated to run as Republican standard-bearer. He defeated William J. Bryan, the Democrat nominee.

1912

President William H. Taft's renomination as Republican candidate met stormy opposition from former President Theodore Roosevelt, who then broke away to form the Progressive, or Bull Moose Party, which also had its convention in Chicago. Both candidates lost to Democrat Woodrow Wilson.

1916

The Republicans nominated Charles E. Hughes, who narrowly lost to President Woodrow Wilson.

1920

Warren G. Harding of Ohio received the Republican nomination. Harding's nomination surfaced from a "smoke-filled room" conference at the Blackstone Hotel, when he was brought in to break a deadlock between candidates.

1932

Democrats and Republicans held conventions in Chicago. Democrats nominated Franklin D. Roosevelt, who defeated Republican President Herbert Hoover.

1940

Democrats returned to Chicago to nominate Franklin Roosevelt for his third term. Before the first year of his third term was over, the nation would be at war with Japan and Germany.

1944

Roosevelt was renominated to head the Democratic ticket at Chicago Stadium. He defeated Republican Thomas E. Dewey, also nominated in Chicago.

1952

Both parties returned to Chicago for their conventions, where Illinois favorite-son Adlai Stevenson got the Democratic nod and war-hero Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower, the Republican, Eisenhower won the election in a landslide.



1956

Illinois Gov. Adlai Stevenson won his second chance to defeat Eisenhower at the Democrat's Chicago convention. He lost.

1960

Republicans nominated Richard M. Nixon to run against Democrat John F. Kennedy. He narrowly lost the November election, which included "creative" ballot counting from Chicago's wards.

1968

Vice-president Hubert H. Humphrey was nominated at a stormy Democratic convention that was marked by riots on the streets of the city as well as raucous political demonstrations on the floor of the Chicago Amphitheater.



that delegates were read FDR's statement declining a third term.

"We want Roosevelt! We Want Roosevelt!" thundered Garry, over the public address system. Enthused delegates took up the chant, extending it for over an hour until it became the "spontaneous" draft movement that Roosevelt said he needed to change his mind.

Roosevelt went on to win his historic third and, subsequently, fourth presidential elections.

"And Thomas D. Garry became known to posterity as the 'Voice from the Sewer,'" said Burke, who likes to regale audiences with that bit of Chicago lore.

Another more genuine draft occurred in Chicago in 1952 when Illinois Gov. Adlai Stevenson won the Democratic nomination to wage an uphill presidential battle against World War II hero and brand-new Republican Dwight D. Eisenhower. The nomination was

the high point of that campaign for Stevenson, who was trounced by Ike in 1952 and again in 1956.

It was at the 1956 convention in Chicago that another, eventually brighter, political star got his first major exposure.

When Stevenson accepted the nomination, he asked the delegates to choose his running mate, and a floor fight broke out under the watchful eyes of the infant television medium.

Although the nod eventually went to Sen. Estes Kefauver of Tennessee, who often wore a coonskin hat, his closest rival, the youthful Sen. John F. Kennedy of Massachusetts, benefited from the national television exposure that helped propel him to the Democratic presidential nomination four years later.

While he had been a major benefactor of a national convention battle, Kennedy took steps towards transforming the function of those political gatherings from

genuine selection processes into more ceremonial affairs.

Using the primary election system in 1960, Kennedy piled up enough delegate votes to steamroll the convention for the nomination.

Last week, Mayor Richard Daley acknowledged the changes when he said, "They're not really conventions to pick a candidate anymore. That's done through the primaries now. They're just rallies now."

But they are spectacular rallies, with hundreds of delegates and even more media. They all spend money and, officials of the host city hope, make the town look good to future potential tourists.

That plan can backfire, of course, as the late Mayor Richard J. Daley learned in 1968 when the Democratic convention degenerated into chaos on and off the floor of the International Amphitheater. TV cameras turned away from platform debates and onto Michigan Avenue, where

Chicago police battled demonstrators while crowds chanted, "The whole world's watching."

In his reflection last week, the mayor's son noted that while Chicago's mayor is still named Daley, a lot of other things have changed in 26 years.

In 1968, the country was embroiled in an unpopular war in Vietnam. Martin Luther King Jr. and Kennedy's brother, Robert, a New York senator and presidential hopeful, had recently been assassinated. The drug culture and Yippie movement were in full swing and the whole country was at the boiling point.

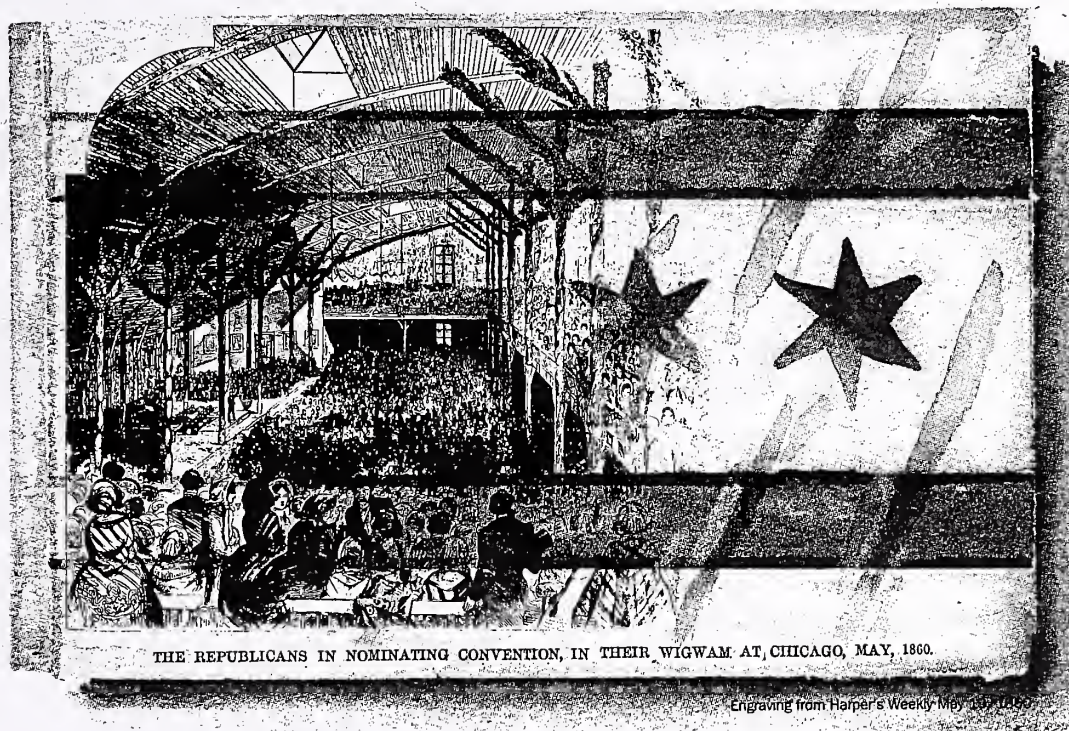
"Things were a lot different then," Daley shrugged.

Armed with that conviction, Chicago prepares once again to reclaim its title as the country's leading political convention site.

With a history of the "voice from the sewer," and "The whole world's watching," it seems the title is well-deserved and ready to come back home.

Tribune BOOKS

Chicago Tribune ■ SUNDAY, AUGUST 11, 1996 ■ SECTION 14



THE REPUBLICANS IN NOMINATING CONVENTION, IN THEIR WIGWAM AT CHICAGO, MAY, 1860.

Engraving from Harper's Weekly, May 1860

THAT'S THE TICKET

Chicago's long, lively history of political conventions is about to get longer

Inside the Wigwam:

Chicago Presidential Conventions 1860-1996
By R. Craig Sautter and Edward M. Burke
Wild Onion Books, 310 pages, \$19.95 paper

Reviewed by Paul Green

Director of the Institute for Public Policy at Governors
State University

Chicago 24, Baltimore 10. No, this is not an NFL football score—it's the number of national political party conventions held in the two top political-conclave cities in America. This year, Chicago, after nearly a three-decade dry spell, will increase its lead over its closest rival by hosting the Democratic Convention.

"Inside the Wigwam," by R. Craig Sautter and Ald. Edward M. Burke, recaps the events, personalities and intrigues of every national political convention held in Chicago. It is a solid piece of work, well researched and written in a breezy, "Chicagoese" style by the pair, who are, respectively, a DePaul University professor and the current chairman of the City Council finance committee. Mayor

Richard M. Daley penned the book's foreword.

Some liberals nestled in Hyde Park or the 46th Ward might dismiss this literary effort with a simple "What books do they write?" Most readers, however, will probably turn promptly to the section on the 1968 Democratic Convention. What they will find is a straightforward discussion of the fears and goals of protesters, police and politicians.

A perusal of the entire book provides some interesting reminders. First, national political conventions have seldom been neat or pristine, especially before the arrival of television. Chicago's political milieu was a perfect match for the scheming, cajoling and plotting required to secure a presidential nomination.

Second, home court advantage is helpful. From the first Chicago convention—which nominated Republican Abraham Lincoln in a two-story hall called the Wigwam—through the 1968 fiasco, control of the convention facilities has often influenced the convention's outcome. Efforts to achieve that control

have included stacking the gallery by issuing spectator tickets to allies of a favored candidate and, in 1940, the city sewer superintendent stampeding the convention by bellowing out "We want Roosevelt!" over the public address system.

Third, nominating conventions in Chicago and elsewhere have worked and have ably served American democracy. They have been, in the authors' words, "an enduring social institution that serves a serious purpose and offers entertaining rituals."

Lastly, given the debate about the abortion platform plank at the upcoming Republican Convention in San Diego, it is interesting to note how rarely Chicago conventions had platform battles. Even when there was a platform contest, the debate and the result were quickly forgotten when the convention ended. The authors support the contention of that legendary Chicagoan, Martin J. Dooley, that "No wan iver reads a [party] platform but th' boy that wrote it."

Reading "Inside the Wigwam" is a great way to celebrate the end of Chicago's banishment as a national convention city.

AS SUN WRITERS SEE IT

Paul T. Gilbert

Days of Destiny In Chicago

It is almost impossible to reconstruct Lake street as it was in the days when it was the bazaar street of early Chicago, and ladies in poke bonnets and hoop skirts stepped down from broughams to do their shopping at the fashionable stores that lined the thoroughfare.



Paul T. Gilbert.

The fire of 1871 swept everything away, including the palatial Tremont House and the historic Wigwam, and after the fire the retail mercantile establishments moved to State street. The unsightly old "L" structure has done the rest.

A big brick warehouse occupies the site of the Wigwam at Wacker drive and Lake street, across from the Merchandise Mart. Even had it not been destroyed by fire, the Wigwam might never have remained as a Lincoln memorial, for it was, at best, a temporary structure, erected at a cost of \$5,000, for the Republican national convention of 1860. And Chicago has a way of tearing down historic shrines.

Lincoln Nominated.

It was in the Wigwam, however, in May, 1860, that the fate of a nation was decided. It was there that Abraham Lincoln, "the rail splitter and giant killer of Illinois" was nominated for the presidency over William H. Seward, the favorite in the betting.

The exterior of the Wigwam was plain, perhaps unconsciously reflecting the character of "Honest Abe." The interior, however, was well adapted to the purpose for which the hall was built. It had a seating capacity of 10,000, and was adequately lighted. Around three sides ran galleries for ladies and their escorts. Roofs and galleries were supported by posts and braces, all of which, during the convention, were entwined with flowers and evergreens. Coats of arms of the 24 states represented decorated the balcony railing. The platform was a sunburst of flags, evergreens, and bunting.

Chicago's women worked enthusiastically to make the convention a success. To quote from Ida Tarbell's "Life of Lincoln," they brought in busts of American notables, ordered great allegorical paintings of Justice, Liberty, and so on, to suspend from the wall; borrowed the whole series of Healy portraits of American statesmen—in short, made the Wigwam gay and festive in aspect.

Michigan's First Chair.

The speaker's chair—the gift of Michigan—was the first chair ever made in the state. "An armchair

its seat was hewn from an immense log and mounted on rockers.

Another chair, made especially for the occasion, was constructed from 34 kinds of wood, each from a different state or territory. "Kansas," Miss Tarbell recalls, "was appropriately represented by a weeping willow, symbol of her grief at being excluded from the sisterhood of states." The gavel used by the chairman had been made from a fragment of Commodore Perry's brig Lawrence.

On the opening day of the convention, May 16, Lincoln banners floated across every downtown street and hung from every gas lamp. Buildings and omnibuses were decorated with flags and Lincoln emblems. Country folk flocked into town in buckboards. The lobbies of the Tremont House and the Sherman House buzzed with politics and politicians. Seward had come on to Chicago with a bodyguard of plug-uglies—or gorillas, as we'd call them now.

Never before and never since did any political convention give way to such an orgy of cheering, frenzy and excitement. Thousands marched the streets yelling and shouting. An hour before the doors of the Wigwam opened, a crowd of 20,000 was massed in Lake street.

And perhaps you can imagine the riot that occurred when the Sewardites, who had been parading through the town with flags and banners, arrived at the convention hall only to find the doors closed, all seats taken, and none but delegates being admitted. With the aid of the police, the Seward delegates were squeezed in, but the rest remained outside and howled. The Westerners had outwitted their New York rivals by packing the hall.

The Lincoln cheering section was led by a stentorian voice that, in the words of one witness, "could drown out Lake Michigan in its wildest fury." At every mention of the Rail Splitter's name, the cheer leaders "let loose loud and prolonged clamor."

When it came to the voting, Seward polled 173½ votes on the first ballot to Lincoln's 102, but 466 votes were needed for the nomination. The second ballot showed a shift to Lincoln, the score standing 184½ to 181 in favor of the Easterner. The third ballot showed Lincoln in the lead, 231½ to 180. It began to look like a deadlock and a chance for some dark horse.

Then, above the clamor, a voice rang out from the Ohio delegation—the voice of destiny. "Ohio

transfers four votes from Mr. Chase to Abraham Lincoln."

This was the break the Lincoln supporters had been looking for. Other states piled into the bandwagon. The convention hall became a madhouse as delegates paraded through the aisles shouting and singing, and waving Lincoln banners. A cannon from the roof of the Wigwam fired a round that shook the entire structure.

The campaign that followed was memorable for the "rivers of fire"—the torchlight processions of the Wide-Awakes. This organization of torchbearers, which within a few weeks spread to every city in the North—had its origin, according to Miss Tarbell, in Hartford, Conn. Cassius N. Clay had made a campaign speech in that city, and a group of ardent young Republicans who formed his bodyguard, to save their garments from the dripping torches, improvised capes of glazed cambric. This "uniform" was so unusual and attracted so much comment that other marching clubs adopted it and adopted also the name of Wide-Awakes.

Many fantastic movements were invented by the Wide-Awakes, among them a peculiar zigzag march or "snake dance," in imitation of the party emblem, the rail fence.

HELPED NAME LINCOLN

Goff A. Hall, of Washington, in
"Split-Rail" Convention.

BROKE POLITICAL DEADLOCK

When Ashman and Cleveland Were Tied
for Chairmanship of Republican Gather-
ing in 1860, Local Man's Vote Elect-
ed Ashman—Was First to Flash News
That Lincoln Had Been Nominated.

Claiming the distinction of being a survivor of the Chicago Republican convention of 1860, known as "the split rail" convention, that nominated Abraham Lincoln for the presidency, Goff A. Hall, 79 years old, also says he is the oldest member of Federal Lodge No. 1, of Masons, the oldest postmaster in the District, the oldest member of the Thirty-second degree Scottish Rite. He is the oldest member of the grand lodge of Masons and one of the oldest Federal and District government employees in the country.

Mr. Hall, nearing the four-score year mark of his life, is a remarkably preserved man. He lives at 1216 Sixteenth street northwest. He modestly makes the claim that he is a survivor of "the split rail" convention, in answer to the statement made by Addison G. Proctor, of St. Joseph, Mo., who, at a Lincoln day banquet held by the Hamilton Club in Chicago, Monday night, said he believed himself the only survivor of that famous political gathering.

Broke Tie for Chairman.

"I have documentary evidence," said Mr. Hall yesterday, "that substantiates my claim as a survivor of the Lincoln convention. I was named a delegate to the Chicago Republican convention in 1860 from Washington city, with B. V. French, Lewis Clephane, and J. J. Coombs. I was the only delegate named to that convention from the District of Columbia that attended the convention. Messrs. Clephane and Coombs appointed substitutes, and Mr. French failed to designate his substitute. Being the only one of the Washington delegation at Chicago, I filled the place of Mr. French. The substitutes or alternates attended and the four of us voted at every ballot in the convention.

"When the contest in the committee on permanent organization came to the selection of the permanent presiding officer, with a tie vote of 15 to 15 for Cleveland, of Connecticut, and Ashman, of Massachusetts, I had not intended to vote. But when the tie was announced Horace Greeley, who was my personal friend, came to me and insisted that I must vote. I voted for Ashman and he was made the permanent chairman.

Is Veteran Telegrapher.

"I was a telegraph operator and arranged to get the name of the nominee out of the convention hall to Washington ahead of the newspaper men. I succeeded and had the news in Washington 30 minutes before the press reports arrived here."

Mr. Hall claims to be one of the few surviving Morse telegraph operators who were connected with the telegraph business in its infancy. He is a native of Vassalboro, Me. He came to Washington in 1847 and was cashier for the old Washington Gas Company. For a number of years he was the manager and sole telegraph operator of the Banc Telegraph Company, in this city, which had an office at Four-and-a-half street and Pennsylvania avenue northwest. The company had only two wires to Philadelphia and one from Philadelphia to New York. The Magnetic Telegraph Company, at Four-and-a-half and Sixth streets, and later in the National Hotel, had two wires north and west. Mr. Hall never learned to read by sound, being a register man.

In 1861 Mr. Hall was a special agent of the Postoffice Department. In 1863 he was stationed at New Orleans as prize auctioneer for the United States government, selling prizes of war, principally contraband goods captured from the Confederates. He sold in a year over \$8,000,000 worth of confiscated Confederate property, principally cotton. Later he was in a similar work in Texas. In 1867 he returned to Washington and was made one of the assistant assessors of the District government, a position he held for a period of fifteen years.

Mr. Hall says he takes as lively an interest in his party and the political news as he did when he was an active politician under the old form of government in the District.



